

Court Information At Your Fingertips

A new, easy-to-use online policies and procedures manual introduced in the Superior Court of San Mateo County provides instant access to information and makes it easier for court staff to learn new processes, fill in for a vacationing co-worker, handle an obscure type of filing, or check on legal or procedural details for a customer. And soon, the manual may be coming to a court near you.

CREATING AND MARKETING THE SYSTEM
TROPHY (Training-Resources-Online-Procedural-Help-for-You) is a proprietary program, developed and owned by the San Mateo County court. The court is offering a TROPHY shareware package free of charge to any other court in California.

The court began developing TROPHY more than a year ago as an outgrowth of the consolidation of its civil division and the need to cross-train its staff. In addition, the court wanted to retain the collective knowledge of its staff, rather than letting that knowledge walk out the door with retiring employees. With the help of a training grant from the Administrative Office of the Courts, the court hired a consultant to assist with the project.

HOW TROPHY WORKS
TROPHY is an online application that stores and maintains the policies and procedures of the court, replacing cumbersome and outdated paper manuals. The online manual features step-by-step instructions and a table of supporting statutes, fees, and definitions of legal terminology. It is searchable by case filing type or statute.

“Employees really like it,” says Jill Selvaggio, project manager and outreach coordinator at the court. “It’s certainly an improvement over print manuals that get dusty and out-of-date.”

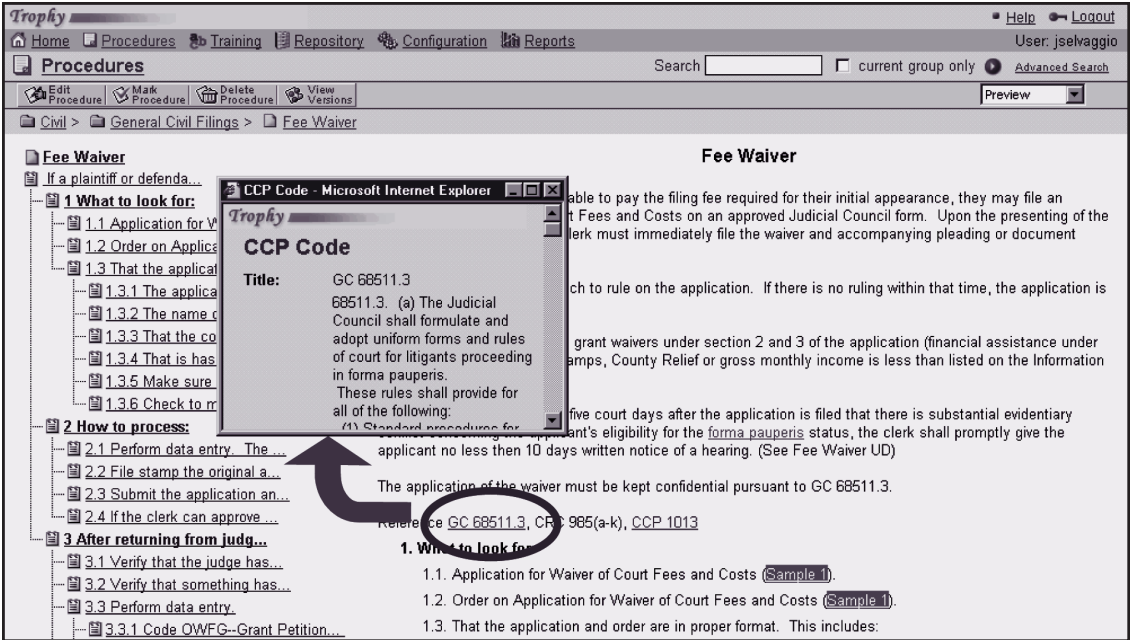
If a court clerk has a question about the filing of a document, he or she can search TROPHY for assistance. For example, a search on “writ of abstract” will yield the procedure for processing the document, definitions of terms, and an example of the form showing the supporting codes and fees, with sections highlighted to show what to look for.

TROPHY was designed so that information could be easily updated or added either by typing it in or by copying from an electronic document and pasting. San Mateo has entered all procedures and training components for its civil division. Additional divisions will go online in the near future.

TROPHY also serves as a training tool for court staff. The training module of TROPHY provides information about a specific area, followed by a series

of questions. Trainees must pass each quiz before moving forward, and TROPHY retains transcripts of the individual’s online sessions.

● For more information or to inquire about acquiring the TROPHY software for your court, contact Jill Selvaggio, 650-599-1519; e-mail: jselvaggio@sanmateocourt.org. ■



Stockton Courthouse Hosts Legal Clinics

A community partnership in San Joaquin County is presenting a series of three free clinics for self-represented litigants seeking legal help with small claims.

The first two clinics were in October and November, and the third will take place December 18. The superior court organized the clinics as a pilot program to assist with cases involving landlords and tenants, auto accidents, personal loans, slip-and-falls, bad checks, auto repairs, and construction matters.

The clinics take place at the Stockton courthouse. Each one begins with a brief orientation to the small claims process. The litigants are then assigned law students for private consultation on their cases. The students—who have received training from the court and from volunteer attorneys—answer questions, offer counsel, and help the litigants complete forms. The litigants

and their law student counselors then return to the group and have their work reviewed by a supervising attorney.

COMMUNITY EFFORT
The clinics are a group effort involving multiple community partners. Students from several different local law schools volunteer as counselors. The San Joaquin County Bar Association recruited the attorneys who give their time as clinic supervisors. El Concilio, a nonprofit, community-based organization whose goal is the empowerment of the Hispanic community, provides a Spanish-language interpreter for each clinic. The court not only organizes and hosts the clinics but provides signage, handouts, reference materials, forms, office supplies, and advertising.

NEXT STEPS
After the clinics, supervising attorneys and law students meet to share their experiences and re-

view the lessons learned. An attendance log is kept to chart participation and demographics at each event, and each litigant is asked to complete an exit questionnaire.

The last of the three clinics is in December, but the court is interested in continuing the program if funding is available. The pilot program is funded by a grant from the Administrative Office of the Courts.

● For more information, contact Leanne Kozak, Superior Court of San Joaquin County, 209-468-8120; e-mail: lkozak@courts.san-joaquin.ca.us. ■

TROPHY, an online court procedures manual developed by the Superior Court of San Mateo County, features step-by-step instructions and a table of supporting statutes, fees, and legal terminology.



More than 60 people attended the first in a series of small claims legal clinics organized by the Superior Court of San Joaquin County. Photo: Courtesy of the Superior Court of San Joaquin County

Siskiyou Court Draws on Local Tradition

In September the Superior Court of Siskiyou County introduced 14 visual storytelling brochures that walk litigants through 8 subject areas of the legal system. The court arrived at this milestone after a kick-off meeting, seven public forums around the county, collaboration with other agencies and stakeholders in the justice system, and many internal discussions.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE
At the beginning of the project, court staff met with representatives of cultures in the community, including a Native American storyteller. The storyteller helped the court identify how to use storytelling principles in its visual guides. The court also had a renowned local artist create symbols and graphics to guide litigants through the legal process. The artist attended the public forums to hear what types of symbols

might help a layperson navigate the court.

“The brochures use colors and symbols to describe court processes from the public’s point of view,” says Lisa Hicks, grants specialist for the court. “The pictures chosen are suggestions from and reflective of the communities and cultures we serve.”

GETTING THE WORD OUT
The court produced brochures on domestic violence restraining orders, child custody and visitation, divorce, civil harassment, guardianship, parentage, juvenile delinquency, and juvenile dependency. It also translated the first six brochures into Spanish.

The court has printed more than 15,000 brochures. Many were distributed at courthouses, family resource centers, public health and mental health organizations, hospitals and clinics, schools, nonprofit social ser-

vice agencies, public libraries, law libraries, law enforcement agencies, the local bar association, and Native American tribal communities. Reactions have been very positive. Attorneys have reported that the brochures help them explain the court process to their clients.

“Based on the positive feedback we have received, we are interested in developing brochures for other areas of the law, including small claims, unlawful detainer, and traffic infractions,” says Ms. Hicks. “However, that decision will depend on funding availability.” The initial development of the 14 brochures was aided by two grants from the Administrative Office of the Courts.

● For more information, contact Lisa Hicks, Superior Court of Siskiyou County, 530-841-4005; e-mail: lhicks@siskiyou.courts.ca.gov.

Making a Better Juror Summons

The judicial branch is putting the finishing touches on a model juror summons that will help the public understand its jury obligations and make it easier to respond when summoned.

VARYING FORMS OF SUMMONSES

California courts send out millions of pieces of direct mail per year in the form of summonses for jury service, but these summonses vary in form and content

depending on jurisdiction. One of the many recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvements—formed in the mid-1990s—was for the branch to develop a more standardized, informative, and understandable jury summons. In addition, the adoption of a “standardized jury summons for use—with appropriate modifications—around the state that is understandable and has con-

sumer appeal” became a legislative mandate with the passage of Assembly Bill 1814 in 2000.

The Task Force on Jury System Improvements was subsequently created to help implement the recommendations of the blue ribbon commission. The task force’s charge was to produce a standardized jury summons for California’s courts that would both be understandable and have consumer appeal. The task force collected and reviewed sample summonses from courts around the state and identified the necessary basic components. It decided that introductory court information—such as court amenities, dress

code, and frequently asked questions—should be in a separate pamphlet inserted with the summons, allowing for a cleaner, more open layout for the model summons.

The task force worked with design and communication consultants to develop and refine drafts of a model summons and juror information pamphlet. The drafts were put before potential jurors in focus groups to gauge their reactions and get their help with the design. Task force members approved the final models in November 2002.

PILOT TESTS AND NEXT STEPS

The task force–approved model summons and pamphlet were then pilot tested in Alameda, San Diego, Shasta, and Ventura Counties. Randomly selected jurors were surveyed about their reactions to the model summons and information pamphlet and were asked whether they thought the new publications would have any effect on juror compliance rates.

The pilot tests are now complete. The final report of the test findings is being shared with the participating courts before submission to the Judicial Council in February.

A working group of court executives will help roll out the model summons to more courts in the next eight months, with technical assistance from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The AOC is also exploring efficiencies and cost savings that might be achieved through pooled printing and summoning practices.

● For more information, contact John Larson, AOC’s Jury Improvement Unit, 415-865-7589; e-mail: john.larson@jud.ca.gov. ■

COLLABORATIVE JUSTICE UPDATE

Community Courts Share Ideas

Representatives from courts around the state are participating in a series of conference calls, started this fall, that allow practitioners to brainstorm, ask questions, and offer solutions to challenges commonly faced by community courts. The calls, hosted by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), give courts an opportunity to benefit from the experiences of their peers.

Community courts are defined as those that hold offenders accountable to the communities they have harmed, intervene proactively, work with offenders to assess their social services needs, and encourage community involvement in the criminal justice process.

Initial Court Conference Call

The first in the series of conference calls, held October 1, included representatives from community courts in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties as well as collaborative justice experts from the AOC. The participants discussed challenges

ranging from the large numbers of homeless offenders who fail to appear in court to the fact that cleaning up one area where offenses have taken place sometimes pushes offenders to another location in the city.

The strategies offered to improve community courts included:

- Performing a needs assessment;
- Conducting meetings with justice partners such as the public defender and the district attorney;
- Partnering with police departments to educate and train officers about the community courts;
- Posting flyers to inform offenders about the community courts;
- Identifying cases being processed in local courts with a marker such as a stamp to expedite transfer to community court; and
- Increasing opportunities for judges to explore alternative sentencing.

Resources Are a Constant Challenge

Another challenge identified by the courts is the need to find additional

sources of funding. Martha Wright of the AOC’s Grants Unit offered these suggestions for securing grant funding:

- Focus on the specific problems in the community that the court is trying to solve.
- Communicate with local police departments, especially if community policing is involved.
- Search out private funding from local businesses and private organizations, such as the Rotary Club and the United Way.
- Contact health and wellness organizations such as local hospitals and health-care foundations.

In addition to grant funding, the AOC provides training and technical assistance and is developing a section on the California Courts Web site where courts can share successful strategies.

● For more information, contact Lisa Lightman, AOC’s Collaborative Justice Unit, 415-865-7614; e-mail: lisa.lightman@jud.ca.gov.

New AOC Division

Continued from page 1

NEXT STEPS

To make sure the highest-priority projects are addressed first, OCCM will rank the projects detailed in all 58 master plans, then create a single five-year trial court capital outlay plan for the entire state. OCCM will review with each court the scoring of its proposed projects prior to the development of the capital outlay plan. The final statewide outlay plan is scheduled to be sent to the state Department of Finance at the beginning of March 2004. Initial funding for trial court building projects is anticipated in the beginning of fiscal year 2005–2006.

EXPANDED SERVICES TO THE COURTS

With the creation of OCCM, the AOC has expanded the consulting services it offers the courts to include real estate, planning, design and construction, and asset management. In addition, the AOC will continue to provide planning and design services and support to the Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court. Services for the appellate courts will be

Acting Director Leads AOC Facilities Division

Kim Davis has been appointed acting director of the Office of Court Construction and Management (OCCM), the newest division of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). To lead the division in fulfilling its responsibility for court facilities statewide, she will oversee court capital fiscal oversight, planning, design and construction, asset management, and real estate services.

Ms. Davis has been employed by the AOC since March 2002. Until her recent appointment she oversaw the Facilities Unit of the AOC’s Finance Division—the unit that evolved into OCCM. Prior to joining the AOC, Ms. Davis was the director of construction management for the County of Los Angeles Development Commission and Housing Authority. She holds a professional degree in architecture from Cornell University and is a licensed architect in California and a member of the American Institute of Architects.



Kim Davis

expanded to include site and facility planning, real estate transactions, land acquisition and support, and design and construction of facilities projects.

● For more information, contact the AOC’s Office of Court Construction and Management, 415-865-8720, or visit <http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/ccm/>. ■



In Solano County, a team consisting of judges, court administrators, county officials, attorneys, architects, and AOC staff is leading the transfer of responsibility for court facilities from the county to the state. Similar teams are at work in Riverside and San Joaquin Counties. These three counties are being used as pilots, and lessons learned from the negotiations will be used in future talks with other counties.

100 Years

Continued from page 1

the Courts organized the contest for children of all ages with experience in the court system. Artwork and poetry—including photography, collage, painting, haiku, rap, and limericks—were submitted to CFCC. They are on display and being used in a variety of conference publications to showcase the stories and talents of youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

CAPTURING THE HISTORY OF THE JUVENILE COURT

The CFCC staff developed numerous materials that reflect on the past century of juvenile courts in California.

They created a 95-minute, two-disc set of recordings of stories told with candor by individuals associated with juvenile court—children, judges, commissioners, probation officers, social workers, and others.

In addition, a history of the juvenile court is in progress. Authored by CFCC Director Diane Nunn, it will detail significant dates and milestones in the juvenile justice system in California. CFCC is also producing fact sheets on areas of juvenile law as part of a larger abstract of statistical data on children and families in juvenile and family court as well as other justice-related institutions. Volume 5 of the *Journal of the Center for Families, Children & the Courts*, which will be available in April, is dedicated to the commemoration of the juvenile courts.

● For more information on the conference and supporting materials, visit CFCC's Web Site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/, or contact Dave Bressler, CFCC, 415-865-7703; e-mail: dave.bressler@jud.ca.gov. ■

California Juvenile Delinquency At a Glance

- More than 225,000 juveniles were arrested in 2002.
- Approximately 1 in 24 juvenile arrests are brought to juvenile court.
- In 2002 the juvenile courts committed 43 of every 100,000 juvenile wards to the California Youth Authority. This figure represents a reduction in the rate of commitment of more than 60 percent in the last 10 years.

Source: California Juvenile Statistical Abstract

● For more information on the abstract, contact Iona Mara-Drita, AOC's Center for Families, Children & the Courts, 415-865-7563; e-mail: iona.mara-drita@jud.ca.gov.

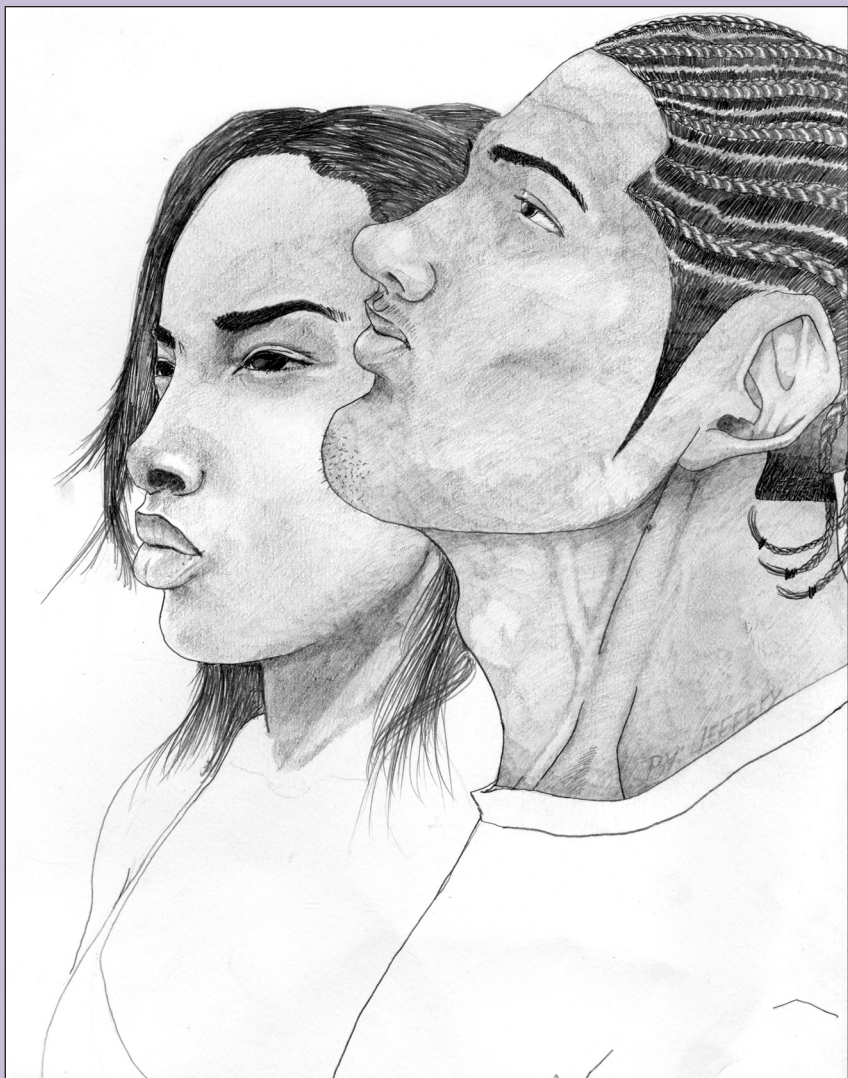


The Celebrating California's Juvenile Court Centennial Conference features works from the Children's Art and Poetry Contest, organized by the Administrative Office of the Courts' Center for Families, Children & the Courts. The contest was open to children of all ages with experience in the California court system. Following are a few samples of the submissions.

Wasted Time

The time that I've wasted is my biggest regret,
Spent in these places I will never forget.
Just sitting and thinking about the things that
I've done,
The crying, the laughing, the hurt and the fun
Now it's just me and my hard driven guilt,
Behind a wall of emptiness I allowed to be built.
I'm trapped in my body just waiting to run,
Back to my youth with its laughter and fun.
The chase is over and there's nowhere to hide,
Everything is gone, including my pride.
With reality, suddenly, right in my face,
I'm scared, alone, and stuck in this place.
Now memories of the past flash through my head,
The pain is obvious by the tears that I've shed.
I ask myself where I went wrong,
I guess I was weak when I should have been strong.
Living for the drugs and the wings I had grown,
My feelings were lost and afraid to be shown.
As I look at myself it's so easy to see,
The fear that I had, afraid to be me.
I'd pretend to be rugged, so fat and so cool,
When actually I was lost like a blind old fool.
I'm getting too old for these thuggish games,
Of acting real hard with no sense of shame.
It's time that I change and get on with my life,
Fulfilling my dreams of a family and a wife.
What my future will hold, I really don't know,
But the years that I've wasted are starting to show.
I just live for when I'll get my new start,
And the dream I still hold inside my heart.
I hope I can make it, I at least have to try,
Because I'm heading towards death, and I don't
want to die. . . .

—Stephen M.



Jeffery D.



Justin C.



Arlene G.



Guadalupe S.

Never Explained

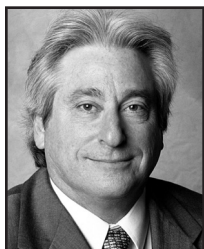
I don't know what it was
That made me change my ways
But all of a sudden I got caught up
And I would disappear for days
I was out on the streets
Always doing something wrong
Kickin it with my homies
Is where I thought I belonged
I never thought about who I hurt
or about my family sitting at home
I just remember that aching memory
Of everyday feeling alone
Eventually it caught up to me
And now here I sit in jail
Hoping that I get another chance
So my life I will not fail.
I started to fall but, I caught myself
And I brought myself back home
So I can learn to feel loved
And no more memories of being so alone.

—Christina H.

Q&A

Making a Difference in Juvenile Court

Conversation With Judge Michael Nash



Judge Michael Nash
Superior Court of
Los Angeles
County

When then-Los Angeles County Municipal Court Judge Michael Nash was elevated to the superior court in 1989, he was asked in which department he would like to preside. He suggested juvenile court because, he reasoned, it was where he could benefit the most people. He certainly has proven that to be true.

Since his appointment, Judge Nash has immersed himself in the juvenile court arenas in Los Angeles, the state, and the nation. He served as presiding judge of the Los Angeles juvenile court from 1997 to 1999 and again from 2002 to the present. He has co-chaired the Judicial Council's Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee, is a trustee of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and is a member of the Vera Institute of Justice National Advisory Board on Adolescent Development.

In September Judge Nash was appointed to the Judicial Council for a three-year term. Court News spoke with him about his experiences in juvenile courts and the state of the juvenile justice system.

Could you give us a brief review of the difference between juvenile dependency and juvenile delinquency courts?

The purpose of the dependency court is to provide for the safety, protection, and physical and emotional well-being of children who are being abused or neglected or who are at risk of abuse and neglect. The court is also designed to ensure that all children under its jurisdiction live in permanent homes, either with their families or elsewhere, within certain time frames designated by the law.

The delinquency court focuses on youth who have committed crimes. Its goal is to protect the public by holding youths accountable for their actions while providing appropriate care, treatment, and guidance to them so that they can become healthy, productive adults.

The common characteristics of the two systems are the focus on each child as an individual and the desire to strengthen the child's family ties as much as possible.

The 100th anniversary of juvenile courts in California will culminate in December in Los Angeles with the Celebrating California's Juvenile Court Centennial Conference, co-sponsored by the Los Angeles juvenile court and the AOC's Center for Families, Children & the

Courts. What do you hope will come out of this conference?

Every year in Los Angeles we have our Partnership Conference. It is attended by more than 1,000 people including judges, attorneys, social workers, probation officers, educators, volunteers, public figures and officials, and anyone else interested in or affiliated with the juvenile court system. The conference is designed to bring all these parties together in a neutral environment and give attendees the opportunity to dialogue with each other and gain a better understanding of their varying perspectives.

At the same time every year, the AOC's Center for Families, Children & the Courts [CFCC] hosts its statewide Beyond the Bench conference, which brings together similar groups to discuss issues related to juvenile courts. In addition, CFCC puts on an annual statewide juvenile delinquency conference.

This year, with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of juvenile courts in California, we have combined these events into one mega-conference. The goals of the conference are to celebrate the juvenile court's past, evaluate where it is now, and hopefully set the course for its future.

You are one of the founders of Adoption Saturdays in Los Angeles County. How did the program get off the ground? How is it affecting foster children as well as the court and court staff?

In Los Angeles County, much of the court's energy and resources were going into the dependency process, which often resulted in freeing kids for adoption. But we found that there was a significant backlog of cases in which children had been freed for adoption but the adoptions themselves weren't proceeding in a timely manner.

To rectify this situation, we brought together representatives from the court, the Department of Children and Family Services [DCF], and two advocacy groups—the Alliance for Children's Rights and the Public Counsel Law Center—to discuss ways to expedite the adoption process. The advocacy groups volunteered to recruit and train attorneys to take on the adoption cases pro bono. The court, instead of opening only one courtroom each day to hear adoptions, decided to make all of its courtrooms available to hear adoption cases. DCF pledged to provide additional resources to help out as well.

While these steps improved the process, an attorney named Steve Meier from the law firm of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher suggested we open up the court on Saturday for adoption hearings. I liked the idea and got a few judges to volunteer on a Saturday. We opened five courtrooms on a Saturday in April of 1998 and did 130 adoptions.

Since then, we've been doing Adoption Saturday at least three times a year. We've done as many as 650 adoptions in one day, and as of this November, we will have completed more than 6,000 adoptions on Saturdays alone. Courts around the state and the country are replicating the program. Last November, close to 40 courts celebrated National Adoption Saturday by opening their courtrooms in order to complete adoptions. This November, at least 110 jurisdictions around the country will be participating in National Adoption Days.

Adoption Saturday is a huge hit with everyone involved. It is convenient for volunteer attorneys, who don't have to leave their practices during the week. Families, friends, and social workers who might normally be at work are able to attend. Judicial officers and court staff, who don't often deal with pleasant matters, enjoy the change.

The media, which often are not interested in happy stories, can't resist this one. It's great for our legal system because it demonstrates that positive outcomes do occur. Most importantly, it expedites permanence for hundreds of children and families. I often say that we create an oxymoron on Adoption Saturday: a happy courthouse.

What is the role of the Judicial Council's Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee?

Over the years, the committee has worked on a variety of issues, including training and rule drafting. One of the most significant rules the committee worked on was rule of court 1438(b), which changed the presumption regarding the representation of children in the dependency system. This rule has helped guarantee that all children have independent representation in dependency court. Independent advocacy gives children a much better chance of achieving permanency and obtaining much-needed services for their physical and emotional development.

Currently before the Judicial Council is another rule drafted by the committee, rule 1479, which defines the responsibilities of attorneys in the delinquency system. It reaffirms the notion that

an appointment to represent a child is continuous while that youngster is under the jurisdiction of the delinquency court. The rule also specifies that these attorneys are more than just defense counsel present only to defend against the charged crime; it is also the attorney's job to advocate for other needs of the child, including educational, emotional, or mental health assistance. If this rule is approved, it can be a positive step toward improving outcomes for youth involved in the delinquency courts.

What does the future hold for juvenile courts? What changes would you like to see?

The beauty of the juvenile court is that it was designed to focus on one kid at a time, and with that focus we are able to positively affect many. However, achieving that positive outcome can be difficult in a system that does not always work as effectively as it could.

The dependency system needs reform in many areas. In short, we need to bring fewer children and families into the system and keep them there for shorter periods of time. We need to re-evaluate how we assess the risk that brings children into the court system and find more and better ways to help meet the needs of families both before and after they enter the system. We also can't lose sight of the fact that children need to be in safe, permanent, and loving homes as soon as possible.

On the delinquency side, we need to focus on creating a more holistic system. California incarcerates more youth than any other state. Although accountability is appropriate, we must realize that virtually all of the youth who enter the delinquency system, whether institutionalized or not, will return to their communities sooner than later. It's the system's job to help them leave better people than when they entered.

To do this, our courts must do a better job of overseeing the system and pushing it to meet the vast array of needs of its youth. Probation officers need to think more like social workers, and attorneys must embrace their roles as child advocates. Finally, we must do a better job of engaging the families in the process. If we do all of these things to a greater degree, we'll all be better for it. ■